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ABSTRACT

Children of migrant farmworkers spend parts of each school year in different communities across the country; some children migrate back and forth between schools in Mexico and the United States. The hardships and rich experiences of this lifestyle provide educators with unique challenges and, at the same time, opportunities to learn and develop new strategies. This digest offers research-based guidance to teachers, to help them use effective instructional strategies that build on the strengths migrant children bring to the classroom. The strategies are: (1) create a positive supportive environment that fosters a sense of safety and trust; (2) build on migrant students' strengths, experiences, and knowledge; (3) enhance self-concept and self-esteem through activities and assignments that allow for real success or that develop coping skills; (4) personalize lessons with students' life experiences; (5) integrate culturally relevant content that encourages positive ethnic affiliation; (6) use cooperative learning, which lowers anxiety levels and increases students' motivation and feelings of empowerment; and (7) develop students' metacognitive learning strategies to help them become independent learners. Contains 20 references. (SV)

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INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR MIGRANT STUDENTS

ERIC Digest

By
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and
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Instructional Strategies for Migrant Students

Velma D. Menchaca and José A. Ruíz-Escalante

ERIC DIGEST

CHILDREN OF MIGRANT farmworkers spend parts of each school year in different communities across the country; some children migrate back and forth between schools in Mexico and the U.S. (Martin, 1994). The hardships and rich experiences of this lifestyle provide educators with unique challenges and, at the same time, opportunities to learn and develop new strategies. This Digest offers research-based guidance for teachers, to help them use effective instructional strategies that will build on strengths migrant children bring to the classroom. The Digest does not address language instruction; for Digests that do, see EDO-RC-91-2 and EDO-RC-90-9.

Background

The National Agricultural Worker Survey found that migrant farmworkers were mostly Hispanic (94%) with 80 percent born in Mexico. However, about 6 to 10 percent of migrants are White or Black Americans. The average annual income for migrant families is $5,000 (Martin, 1994). Some live in housing that does not meet minimum inspection standards, and many suffer occupation-related health problems such as farm injuries and pesticide poisoning. Many also suffer health problems related to poverty, such as malnutrition and poor sanitation (Huang, 1993).

Several factors associated with the migrant lifestyle predispose migrant students to being at risk of dropping out of school early (Baca & Harris, 1988; Platt, Cranston-Gingras, & Scott, 1991). Irregular school attendance, traveling from one temporary site to another, and limited English language proficiency can limit the school success rate of these students, leading some to drop out of school as early as the upper elementary grades. As with all students, migrant students achieve best when the schools honor and value who they are. With that in mind, the following instructional strategies are recommended to help teachers help migrant students overcome circumstances that may jeopardize their success.

Instructional Strategies

Create a positive environment. Migrant students often find themselves in new and unfamiliar classrooms. The challenge of adjusting to strange, new living and learning environments often contributes to feelings of isolation and loneliness. Teachers can help students overcome these feelings by modeling respect and eliminating any form of threat or ridicule. Teachers can further foster a sense of safety and trust by sharing some of their own experiences, and by assigning older students to act as mentors or buddies to new migrant students. For a collection of strategies and activities designed to promote mutual respect, trust, and support in the classroom, see *Establishing a Positive Classroom Climate* (Huggins, 1983a).

Build on migrant students' strengths. Most migrant students have lived, traveled, and studied in several states. Teachers can incorporate into lessons these diverse experiences and the richness of students' cultures and languages. Examples include recognizing migrant children for their travel experiences, knowledge of geography, and for overcoming crises on the highway. Building on these experiences and capabilities validates students' knowledge. Such validation enhances students' self-images and sense of self-worth (Gonzales, 1991).

Enhance self-concept and self-esteem. Migrant students must have faith in their own abilities so that they can persist and succeed despite the many obstacles they encounter in school. Having a positive self-concept helps students achieve, which then further enhances self-esteem (Studstill, 1985). When necessary, teachers should modify assignments to allow for real success in meaningful activities that are valued by the student and by others, such as family and friends (Studstill, 1985). MACRO Educational Associates, Inc.'s (1974) *Teacher Resource Guide for the Development of Positive Self-Concept in Migrant Children* describes effective methods and materials used in developing positive self-concepts for migrant students. Another resource, *Building Self-Concept in the Classroom* (Huggins, 1983b), provides activities designed to promote self-awareness, build self-esteem and cope effectively with mistakes and put-downs.

Personalize lessons with students' experiences. Drawing from students' life experiences in lessons helps students understand ideas and transfer them to other content. To find out about students' experiences, teachers can have children write or tell about them (MACRO Educational Associates, Inc., 1974). Later, teachers can incorporate both their own experiences and the experiences of the children into lessons in content areas such as language arts, social studies, and science. Teachers can personalize content by using familiar places and names in addition to using analogies to connect new concepts to students' experiences (Tinajero, 1984).

Integrate culturally relevant content. A curriculum that includes culturally relevant content enables migrant students to develop pride in their culture and learn content from a familiar cultural base (Marinez & Ortiz de Montellano, 1988). Examples of books that focus on the lives, challenges, or adventures of children of different cultures include *Pablo's Tree* (Mora, 1994), *The Rough-Face Girl* (Martin, 1992), or *Too Many Tamales* (Soto, 1993). Teachers can read to students, generate discussion, and then have

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the students either write or share in groups some similarities and differences between the book's characters and the students' own lives. Such cultural material can be used in social studies, science, reading, or language arts.

Encouraging positive ethnic affiliation serves multiple purposes. It can influence the development of values, attitudes, lifestyle choices, and approaches to learning (Gollnick & Chinn, 1994). Nurturing ethnic affiliation also helps all students learn about and respect other cultural groups' heritages and histories, while keeping their own culture instilled in their hearts and their minds.

Use cooperative learning. Both theory and research support cooperative learning as an effective instructional strategy. Studies have shown that migrant students do well in cooperative learning settings because they sense other students are encouraging and supporting their efforts to achieve (Johnson, Johnson, & Maruyama, 1983). Cooperative learning lowers anxiety levels and strengthens motivation, self-esteem, and empowerment by using students as instructional agents for their classmates (Platt, Cranston-Gingras, & Scott, 1991). Students take responsibility for both their own learning and the learning of their peers. By becoming active group participants, they gain equal access to learning opportunities. *Teaching Cooperative Skills* (Huggins, 1983c) provides guidance in leading activities that enable students to work cooperatively in pairs or in small groups.

Develop students' metacognitive learning strategies. This strategy is used to help students become independent learners by helping them comprehend concepts, monitoring their success, and making the necessary adjustments when meaning breaks down. Students learn to recognize when they are approaching an obstacle, make necessary corrections, and proceed.

Teachers instruct students to employ alternative strategies once they have recognized and determined a breakdown in comprehension. For example, if a student is reading and has difficulty understanding the text, he or she could apply some "fix-it" strategies (Baker & Brown, 1984), such as

- ignore and read on,
- anticipate the problem to be resolved by future information,
- make an educated guess based on prior knowledge,
- reflect on what has already been read,
- reread the current sentence or paragraph, or
- consult the glossary, encyclopedia, or teacher (Collins & Smith, 1980).

Conclusion

Migrant students present a challenge to our educational system and, at the same time, they enrich it. Some of the enriching factors these students bring into our schools are their cultural and ethnic heritage and their knowledge of more than one language. They also have extensive travel experiences and first-hand experience with our nation's agricultural, dairy, or fishing-related industries. It is important that educators build on the richness of migrant students' experiences and culture to make learning more meaningful. Educators should present authentic real-life examples to students, make content information culturally relevant, and use instructional strategies that promote cooperative learning and develop students' metacognitive skills. When migrant students can relate to the information being presented, they are more likely to understand academic concepts and experience success in school.

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